

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1325
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MONTREAL PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: PQ NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING: LEVESQUE SAYS PARTY MAY
"PARTICIPATE" IN FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

REF: QUEBEC 0143

1. RENE LEVESQUE HAS MADE HIS MOST EXPLICIT THREAT YET ON THE QUESTION OF PQ ACTION IN THE UPCOMING FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN. BUOYED BY THE POPULAR SUCCESS OF HIS PARTY'S STAND IN THE SALES TAX DISPUTE WITH OTTAWA (REFTEL) LEVESQUE HINTED TO PARTY MILITANTS GATHERED FOR A MEETING OF THE PARTI QUEBECOIS NATIONAL COUNCIL AT LAVAL UNIVERSITY THAT THEY WOULD BE FREE TO DOBATTLE AGAINST THE FEDERAL LIBERALS IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTION. THE OFFICIAL PQ ATTITUDE IN A FEDERAL ELECTION, LEVESQUE SAID, WOULD BE "NON-INTERFERENCE BUT MOST CERTAINLY NOT INDIFFERENCE." AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING YESTERDAY AFTERNOON (APR 30), LEVESQUE WENT MUCH FURTHER: THE PQ WOULD NOT HESITATE, HE SAID, TO "PARTICIPATE" IN THE CAMPAIGN UNLESS OTTAWA CHANGED ITS POSITION ON THE SALES TAX ISSUE AND COMPENSATED QUEBEC IN THE SAME WAY IT DID THE OTHER PROVINCES. LEVESQUE REFUSED

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TO BE DRAWN OUT ON THE NATURE OF THE POSSIBLE PQ "PARTICIPATION."

2. LEVESQUE'S THREAT WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING, WHICH WAS OTHERWISE DEVOTED PRIMARILY TO HOUSEKEEPING MEASURES. IN A SURPRISE MOVE, HOWEVER, THE COUNCIL PASSED A MOTION REQUIRING THE GOVERNMENT TO SUBMIT ITS SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PROPOSAL TO THE COUNCIL FOR APPROVAL BEFORE MAKING IT

PUBLIC. THIS MOTION CARRIED THE DAY OVER THE STRENUOUS OPOSITION OF THE PARTY'S EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, WHICH AFFIRMED THAT THE BROAD OUTLINES OF THE SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PLAN WERE ALREADY INSCRIBED IN THE PARTY PLATFORM AND THAT APPROVAL BY THE COUNCIL, THEREFORE, WAS NOT NECESSARY. A FACTION LED BY THE MILITANTS OF MONTREAL CENTRE, HOWEVER, INSISTED THAT THE COUNCIL SHOULD BE GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO PRONOUNCE ITSELF ON THE SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PROPOSAL, EVEN IF THIS MEANT CALLING AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL. THEIR MOTION PASSED BY A COMFORTABLE MARGIN.

3. COMMENT: THE GOVERNMENT IS UNLIKELY TO BE PLEASED WITH THIS RESTRICTION ON ITS FREEDOM OF ACTION, AND THE GUESSING AT THE COUNCIL MEETING WAS THAT PARTY LEADERS WOULD MAKE A DETERMINED EFFORT TO HAVE MONTREAL-CENTRE'S MOTION OVERTURNED AT THE NEXT NATIONAL

COUNCIL, WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE IN GRANBY IN JUNE. MONTREAL-CENTRE, LED BY LOUISE HAREL, HAS BEEN A STRONGHOLD OF THE MORE RADICAL WING OF THE PQ AND A TRADITIONAL THORN IN LEVESQUE'S SIDE. THE BRANCH HAS OFTEN LED

OPPOSITION TO THE PARTY LEADERSHIP IN FAVOR OF SOCIAL REFORM, POPULAR

PARTICIPATION IN POLICY MAKING AND SEPERATISM. THE MOTION PASSED LAST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WEEKEND WAS A CLEAR JAB AT PARTY LEADERS, SEVERAL OF WHOM ARE ARE CONSIDERED UNRELIABLE ON HHE INDEPENDENCE ISSUE.

4. OTHERWISE, THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF FLAGGING PQ MORALE AT THE COUNCIL MEETING. THE HALL WAS PLASTERED WITH "OUI AU REFERENDUM" POSTERS AND MILITANTS CAUCUSED BUSILY TO PLAN STRATEGY FOR THE FORTH-COMING CAMPAIGN. THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM SEEMED TO BE THAT THE REFERENDUM WOULD TAKE PLACE IN THE FALL OF 1979, ALTHOUGH NOBODY WAS

RULING OUT AN EARLIER DATE.
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